



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
February 15th, 2011**

I. Call to Order & Introductions: Bill Gray, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Bill asked for all present to please stand for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged in and to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Approval of Minutes: Mike Subin, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the January Meeting Summary Minutes. Pete Esker, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the January Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Presentation on Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Grant Opportunity for the Troops Project – Jackie Ogg, Commissioner; and Lorrie Knight-Major, Director of Military and Veterans Initiatives Easter Seals Greater Washington-Baltimore Region, Inc., and Commissioner

Last March, 2010, Chuck Short, Special Assistant to County Executive Isiah Leggett, convened a group of individuals including Congressman Van Hollen, Senator Cardin, Senator Mikulski, Department of Health and Human Services staff, and other nonprofits in Montgomery County in preparation for BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure), and to determine what priorities the County should have in working with veterans. The RWJF grant opportunity evolved during these meetings. It is a matching grant that will provide \$500K over the next four years (or \$125K per year). The grant required that applicants must be nominated by a local community organization. The Community Foundation nominated Easter Seals, which submitted a Troops and Family Care Project grant proposal with a budget of \$1.4M for the four year period. Funding will go towards direct services for veterans. The Mental Health Association (MHA) will be a partner in providing services.

Lorrie Knight-Major discussed the objectives of the Troops and Family Care Project (see Attachment A) and provided an Executive Summary (see Attachment B).

As part of the first objective, forums will be held led by Congressman Van Hollen and County Executive Leggett to invite key leadership from military, veteran, nonprofit and funding communities to create a circle of local, state and national experts to serve as high level advisors.

The current plan is to complete the community mapping and outreach piece prior to going live to the public. Two client navigators will be hired to handle the case load, with the first client navigator being hired early on in the process. They will be located at the Easter Seals office in downtown Silver Spring.

Easter Seals is 1 of 14 organizations that have been selected nationwide for the final round of selections. Out of those 14 organizations, 10 will be selected to receive the grant. If Easter Seals is chosen, it will need to raise \$500K by the end of June as the grant money will be released on

July 1st. They currently have raised \$250K from various donors. The biggest challenge when meeting with possible donors is explaining the unmet needs of veterans and/or their families where services provided by the VA are not satisfactory or require additional assistance. The Community Foundation [Troops and Family Care Fund Feasibility Study](#) details the needs of veterans returning from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

The program will be targeting National Guard and Reserve members and younger veterans - populations that tend to fall through the gaps. Of the 22M veterans in the United States, only 8M are enrolled in the VA creating a huge gap for those not accessing services. Approximately 70% of veterans leave their jobs within the first year and 80% of veterans drop out of school the first year.

In terms of sustainability, Easter Seals will have four years to demonstrate that there is a need for services and that program is operating successfully. Johns Hopkins Medicine Department of Psychiatry will also be evaluating our model.

Easter Seals will be hosting a site visit from RWJF on April 15th. Commissioners may be contacted to participate.

IV. Update on Veterans Collaborative, Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner

The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Washington, DC has submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services a revised Memorandum of Understanding to provide tele-mental health services at the County's Piccard Drive location that is currently being reviewed by the County Attorney.

V. Chair and Vice Chair Report – Bill Gray and Jerry Godwin

On January 24th, Bill Gray, Chair, met with DHHS Director Uma Ahluwalia for a DHHS BCC Meeting where County budget cuts were discussed. DHHS will have a 5% reduction in their operating budget.

On January 31st, Bill attended a meeting in Annapolis whereby Maryland's Lt. Governor Brown and approximately 25 presidents from community colleges and public four-year institutions met to sign the [Maryland Campus Compact for Student Veterans](#). The Compact aims to improve on-campus services for veteran students.

On February 10th, Bill attended the annual Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCC) Meeting with County Executive Leggett where he presented the Commission's Fiscal Year 2012 Key Issues of Concern.

Bill will be a guest speaker at the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) luncheon tomorrow, February 16th. He will discuss the accomplishments and future goals of the CVA.

VI. Unfinished Business

Rotating Veterans Display at Civic Center and Libraries

Bill Gray, Chair, asked Commissioners Sharon Hodge and Pete Esker to work together on the displays.

Planning for 2011 Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day – March 30, 2011

The event has been renamed Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Second Annual Reunion. It will be held at the Silver Spring Civic Building in the Great Hall and will start at 6:00 p.m. The

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) will have a registration table and will also maintain a VIP list.

Mike Subin is scheduled to make introductions. The program includes a panel discussion featuring Tom Berger, Ph.D., Executive Director, VVA Veterans Health Council; Bernard Edelman, M.A., Deputy Director for Policy and Government Affairs and author of *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*; Marc Leepson, M.A., Arts Editor and Senior Writer, the VVA Veteran; Wayne Miller, M.A., LMSW, Team Leader/Supervisor Social Worker at Department of Veterans Affairs Readjustment Counseling Services/Vet Center; Sam Walinsky, M.S., Trainer and Connections Facilitator, Veterans Administration/Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI). County Executive Isiah Leggett has agreed to speak about his 2009 visit back to Vietnam.

Currently 10 Veteran Service Organization's (VSO) are signed up to have informational tables. Jane asked Commissioners to notify VSO's they are affiliated with about the event. Betsy will be working with the County's Public Information Office to create a press release. Susan Kirk, Commissioner, offered to contact organizations for food donations.

The next Planning Committee meeting will be held prior to the next CVA Meeting on Tuesday, March 15th from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, in the 1st Floor Rose Conference Room.

VII. New Business

Sharon shared information regarding [House Bill 336 – Task Force on Military Service Members, Veterans, and the Courts](#), and companion [Senate Bill 531 – Task Force on Military Service Members, Veterans, and the Courts](#). The Bills are seeking to create a “Task Force to study the military service–related mental health issues and substance abuse problems that may apply or arise in certain court cases and to consider recommending the establishment of a special court for eligible defendants who are veterans or members of the armed services on active duty who appear to suffer from certain problems related to military service”. Members of the Commission can comment on these bills as private citizens. Betsy, as a Staff Member of DHHS, has already made comments on behalf of the department.

VIII. Announcements

Pete Esker, Commissioner, along with Don Scheuerman, Jr., Chief, Project Management Section, Department of General Services, will be visiting Toby Mendez's studio to survey the bronze plaques he is creating for the Veterans Plaza Memorial at the Silver Spring Civic Building. If the plaques are acceptable, then the County will sign off on them. Pete will email the Commission a summary of his findings.

Carl Bedell, Commissioner, will contact the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) or Wounded Warrior Project about having them present to the Commission at an upcoming meeting about the needs of returning veterans.

MOAA is having Phil Alperson speak at their next meeting about Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). They tentatively have Congresswoman Donna Edwards scheduled to speak at the April Meeting. The MOAA is also planning to meet with State representatives in Annapolis on March 3rd to discuss the wants and needs of Veterans in Montgomery County.

Ken Barnum, VA Homeless Outreach Social Worker, noted that 512 homeless veterans received services at the Winterhaven Stand Down held on January 22nd.

Michael Higgs, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 12, announced that Chapter 12 is planning a Veterans Muster for May 21st to be held at the Elks Lodge in Montgomery County. The Muster will help to get veterans updated on the recent law changes and will try to reach out to new veterans. The VA has agreed to send service representatives.

Ann Humphrey, Representative from Congressman Van Hollen's Office, announced that Congressman Van Hollen is planning a veteran's event that will include workshops, resources, and individuals to provide assistance with filling out forms. A date for the event has not been set yet.

Adjournment: 7:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting:

Tuesday, March 15th, 2011, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville in the 1st Floor Tan Conference Room.

Respectively submitted:

Carly Clem, OSC

Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison

Troops and Family Care Project – List of Objectives

- 1) Build connections, trust and relationships between leaders of the region's military institutions, veterans service organizations, local governments and community stakeholders focused on meeting the health, mental health and support service needs of military families. Results include: key programming, policy and funding changes occur on the local, state and federal level to enable more productive community-based partnerships to strengthen services for military families.
- 2) Increase appropriate and timely referrals between military service providers and the community, including nonprofits, businesses, educational institutions and local governments. Results include: A comprehensive community map will be in place for serving military families. Community-based nonprofits will increase their capacity to identify, refer and/or treat the unique needs this population and the local military service network will have a greater understanding of local resources and access to programs to meet the needs of troops and their families.
- 3) Create and maintain a coordinated mechanism to simplify the maze of benefits and shift some of the burden of identifying and obtaining resources away from military families. Results include: User-friendly tools for services for military families to find and secure resources. At least 200 troops, their family members or caregiver will access the new system. Client navigators will be available to assist soldiers, their families, and service providers identify and secure needed services. Each navigator will directly case-manage up to 40 families with half of those needing more intensive services, resulting in more stability of their health, mental health and social service.

Executive Summary: *Troops and Family Care Project*

Statement of Need: Montgomery County, Maryland is a suburb just outside of Washington, DC. In many ways it is a commuter community to the nation's capital; home of the Pentagon, Arlington Cemetery, and numerous war memorials. Some of the finest military medical institutions in the country are located here – and the new state-of-the-art Walter Reed National Military Medical Center will open September 2011 in Montgomery County. However, even with this substantial military presence, there exists a gulf between the military and the local community's ability to work together to meet the needs of troops and their families. This disconnect is significant for those involved with the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like all soldiers in these conflicts, the estimated 4,000 Montgomery County, Maryland soldiers ever involved in these wars face longer and more numerous deployments than in previous conflicts. Multiple deployments compound health, mental health, financial and other challenges. Overcoming these can be particularly acute for National Guard and Reservists who are not base-assigned. Traumatic brain injury, amputation and post-traumatic stress disorder are considered the signature wounds of these conflicts. An estimated 700 wounded soldiers and their family members from other parts of the country come to Montgomery County for medical care. The good news is that over 90% of injured soldiers survive their wounds, bringing more soldiers home from the field of battle than any other war in our history. The challenge is that recovery from the physical and emotional wounds of war can require life-long adaptations for the wounded warrior as well as family members and caregivers. The military is overwhelmed and the community is unprepared. The current system of care is fragmented, lacks coordination and ultimately fails to adequately serve many of our military families.

Project Objectives: The proposed project seeks to transform the current fragmented system from one that primarily reacts to soldier and family inquiries to one that rallies the entire community to proactively identify military families in need and provide a readily accessible, widely acknowledged, and definable set of services. To attain this vision of change, the project will create new working "pathways" between local governments, military and veteran agencies, military-specific nonprofits, local community-based nonprofits and other community stakeholders. We seek to identify the multiple points of entry military families may be accessing and coordinate those resources more effectively. Mapping community capacity is the first step in clarifying gaps in services and identifying how service providers can work better together. Strengthening relationships between and among military helping networks and community-based networks will lead to more realistic and effective dialog about how to fill gaps. Ultimately, the project will decrease fragmentation of services to better assist military families who are typically quite resilient, but need additional support during and after deployment.

Expected Outcome: Through outreach, training, resource mapping, direct services and advocacy we expect that: 1) Troops, their family members or caregivers will have access to more resources thereby improving their health, mental health and social service outcomes; 2) The maze of public benefits and nonprofit support services will be simplified and/or clear for military families as well as for those trying to provide assistance; 3) Local community based nonprofits, military service providers and non-military community stakeholders will coordinate services, understand the role each can have on meeting needs of troops and their families, and jointly advocate for improvements in policies and programs to strengthen delivery of services.

Sustainability: Our sustainability is two-fold: 1) *Better, more strategic use of current resources:* A key element of the proposed project is increasing our community's understanding of the landscape for how military, veteran and public resources are currently allocated. At a minimum, the project will reduce duplication of resources. Further the project will assist our military families in applying for all eligible federal and state military-related benefits. Finally, the proposed coordination of service provision and mapping of resources will ultimately stimulate more local private giving to leverage and complement available public dollars. 2) *Redirecting and/or increasing new resources:* A concurrent goal for sustainability is identifying gaps in programming, policy and funding of health, mental health and social services for military families. We expect to work together with our military partners to advocate for change along all these lines. Utilizing technology, providing wrap around services and local access to military benefit counselors are all areas where a modest change could lead to stronger outcomes for military families. New and innovative ways to fund programs are also emerging. Especially in the area of mental health, there is a growing interest on the part of federal and state agencies in working with communities across the country in supporting military families.

Funding Partners: We are fortunate to have a strong partner in the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region (CFNCR). Three years ago, CFNCR and Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett commissioned the Troops and Family Care Fund Feasibility Study to explore ways to stimulate a coordinated community-based nonprofit response and offer services that complement those of government and national nonprofits. This project will help clarify the landscape of resources and where private dollars can have the most impact.